

## AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. Canceled.

2. (Currently Amended) A mail piece verification system for processing mail pieces, the mail pieces having associated therewith respective mail piece data, the system comprising :

a data center in operative communication with a plurality of mail processing centers, the data center including a plurality of account files corresponding to a plurality of postage metering systems; the data center being adapted to store reset data in each of the plurality of account files representative of reset activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively; receive respective mail piece data corresponding to the mail pieces from the plurality of mail processing centers; store empirical data in each of the plurality of account files representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively; conduct a forensic accounting analysis of the empirical data and the reset data associated with a selected postage metering system ~~having an existing serial number~~ using a previously defined time period over which to conduct the forensic accounting analysis; and download graphic data~~issue a new serial number~~ to the selected postage metering system to be included in the mail piece data of mail pieces subsequently prepared by the selected postage metering system~~replace the existing serial number~~ if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system; ~~and provide instructions to the plurality of mail processing centers to withhold processing of mail pieces containing the existing serial number while allowing normal processing of mail pieces containing the new serial number.~~

3. Canceled.

4. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 23, wherein the data center is further adapted to conduct an inspection of the selected postage metering system if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system.

5. Canceled.

6. Canceled.

7. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 23, wherein the data center is further adapted to issue instructions to the plurality of mail processing centers to increase a sample rate for mail pieces including mail piece data corresponding to the selected postage metering system if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system.

8. Canceled.

9. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a mail piece verification system for processing mail pieces, the mail pieces having associated therewith respective mail piece data, the method comprising:

receiving mail pieces at a plurality of mail processing centers that have been prepared by a plurality of postage metering systems;

obtaining the respective mail piece data from the mail pieces;

maintaining a plurality of account files corresponding to the plurality of postage metering systems;

storing reset data in each of the plurality of account files representative of reset activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively;

using the respective mail piece data, storing empirical data in each of the plurality of account files representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively;

conducting a forensic accounting analysis of the empirical data and the reset data associated with a selected postage metering system ~~having an existing serial number~~ using a previously defined time period over which to conduct the forensic accounting analysis; and

~~downloading graphic data to issuing a new serial number to the selected postage metering system to replace the existing serial number~~ if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system, the graphic data be included in mail piece data of mail pieces subsequently prepared by the selected postage metering system;

~~allowing normal processing of mail pieces containing the new serial number; and~~

~~instructing the plurality of mail processing centers to withhold processing of mail pieces containing the existing serial number.~~

10. Canceled..

11. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 9, further comprising:

conducting an inspection of the selected postage metering system if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system.

12. Canceled.

13. Canceled.

14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 9, further comprising:

increasing a sample rate at the plurality of mail processing centers for mail pieces including mail piece data corresponding to the selected postage metering system.

15. Cancelled.

16. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a data center for processing data associated with mail pieces and a plurality of postage metering systems for preparing mail pieces, the method comprising:

obtaining reset data representative of reset activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems;

obtaining empirical data representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems; and

conducting a forensic accounting analysis of the empirical data and the reset data associated with a selected postage metering system ~~having an existing serial number~~ using a previously defined time period over which to conduct the forensic accounting analysis; and

downloading graphic data to issuing a new serial number to the selected postage metering system to replace the existing serial number if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system, the graphic data for inclusion on mail pieces subsequently prepared by the selected postage metering system;

~~providing instructions to allow normal processing of mail pieces containing the new serial number; and~~

~~providing instructions to withhold processing of mail pieces containing the existing serial number.~~

17. Canceled.

18. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 16, further comprising:

conducting an inspection of the selected postage metering system if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system.

19. Canceled.

20. Canceled.

21. Canceled.

22. (New) The mail piece verification system of claim 2, wherein the data center is further adapted to issue a new serial number to the selected postage metering system to replace an existing serial number of the selected postage metering system if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data fro the selected postage metering system.

23. (New) The method of claim 9, further comprising:

issuing a new serial number to the selected postage metering system to replace an existing serial number if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system;

allowing normal processing of mail pieces containing the new serial number; and

instructing the plurality of mail processing centers to withhold processing of mail piece containing the existing serial number.

24. (New) The method of claim 16, further comprising:

issuing a new serial number to the selected postage metering system to replace an existing serial number if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system;

providing instructions to allow normal processing of mail pieces containing the new serial number; and

providing instructions to withhold processing of mail piece containing the existing serial number.